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## **Subjective Outcome Evaluation of the Project P.A.T.H.S.: Findings Based on the Perspective of the Program Implementers (Secondary One Program)**

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**Abstract:** The aim of the current study is to replicate the subjective outcome evaluation based on program implementers in the first year (2006/07 school year) of the Full Implementation Phase (Secondary 1 Level) of the P.A.T.H.S. Project. After the completion of the Tier 1 program in 2007/08 school year, 1,324 implementers from 213 schools completed a Subjective Outcome Evaluation Form for instructors to assess their views of the program, themselves and the perceived effectiveness of the program. Reliability test indicated the questionnaire was internally consistent. The results showed that, similar to the first year of implementation, high proportions of the respondents had positive perceptions of the program and their own performance. Regarding the perceived effectiveness of the program, roughly 90% of the respondents thought the program was helpful. Statistically significant increase in positive responses was also found in some items of perceived effectiveness in the second year of implementation. Possible factors contributing to such changes, including accumulation of experience and skill enhancement of the implementers, as well as stronger support from the schools, are discussed.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, positive adolescent training, program evaluation, program implementers, student development, subjective outcome evaluation

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## INTRODUCTION

“P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme” is a pioneering research-based positive youth development (PYD) program in a Chinese context. The word “P.A.T.H.S.” stands for “Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programmes”. It is funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, aiming at promoting holistic development among adolescents in Hong Kong. The program consists of two tiers: Tier 1 program, the focus of the current study, is an universal PYD program, normally with 20 hours of training in each school year for students in Secondary 1 to 3 to participate; Tier 2 is a training for students identified with greater psychosocial needs. There are two implementation phases: Experimental Implementation Phase and Full Implementation Phase. The Full Implementation Phase was executed in 2006/07 school year, with 207 schools joining the Secondary 1 Tier 1 Program.

A subjective outcome evaluation based on the program implementers was done to assess the implementers’ views of the program, themselves and the perceived effectiveness of the program in the first year of implementation. According to Shek (1), the importance to examine the experiences of program implementers, the stakeholders of the program, especially in the context of human services are six fold: (i) implementers have the first-hand experience regarding the implementation process of the program (p.496); (ii) because of the professionalism and experience of the program implementers, their views in certain aspects may be more accurate than the program participants; (iii) the inclusion of implementers’ comments can give them a sense of fairness and respect; (iv) this kind of evaluation can help to provide a transparent and accurate picture on the implementation quality; (v) according to the principle of triangulation, collecting the views of the program implementers can help increase the credibility of the evaluation, since the evaluation is done based on different data sources; and (vi) the implementers’ view towards the program would, consciously or unconsciously, affect how the program is launched. The evaluation may provide insight into the context in which the program operates (p.493).

The pivotal role of implementers in program effectiveness is also demonstrated in a study by Hui in 2003 (2). She examined the introduction of developmental guidance as a formal curriculum in a Hong Kong secondary school and identified several factors which facilitated the program implementation. First, teachers’ acceptance of the beliefs promoted in the program was necessary. Teachers were more involved in implementation if they identified with the belief. Second, teachers’ knowledge and familiarity with the content and the teaching approach, and their active participation in the activities were important for encouraging students’ involvement. Third, principal’s support and administrative arrangement to lessen teachers’ workload and dealt with teachers’ concerns proactively were essential. The establishment of the “dual classroom

teacher” system facilitated better communication, mutual support between classroom teachers and their engagement in teamwork, and alleviated their pressure in preparation and management. Finally, school played an important role in offering experiences to strengthen students’ learning and in cultivating a learning environment filled with positive interpersonal relationships. The program delivery should involve all students and all school personnel.

The above experience revealed that apart from the program content, the implementers and the school system also greatly affect students’ learning and development. Referring to Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, the interactions between people and the various systems within their environment have tremendous impact upon human behavior (3). Within this perspective, people and their environment continually influence one another in a bidirectional, transactional or mutual manner. The model also emphasizes on the importance of an individual’s life settings (i.e. microsystem), such as family and school, the interface between these settings (i.e. mesosystem), as well as the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture of which the other systems are the concrete manifestation (i.e. macrosystem) in influencing behavior. Hence, in order to effectively facilitate the positive growth of teenagers, developmental programs of good quality, experienced and devoted implementers with relevant knowledge and understanding of the program, a strong and comprehensive system support from school, participation of parents, the community and society are of great importance.

In the subjective outcome evaluation on the first year of implementation of the Full Implementation Phase (Secondary 1 Level), the findings based on program implementers from 207 schools are encouraging. In general, a high proportion of the implementers had positive perception towards the program and themselves as the program implementers, and roughly four-fifths of the implementers regarded the program as helpful to the program participants (1). To get a clearer and broader picture on how the implementers view the program, themselves as the implementers, and the perceived effectiveness on program participants, a replication study was done by collecting subjective outcome evaluation data based on program implementers from 213 schools participating in the second year (2007/08 school year) of the Full Implementation Phase (Secondary 1 Level). The implementers’ responses and a comparison between the implementers’ perception in the two implementation periods were the foci of the current study.

## **METHOD**

### **Respondents and Procedures**

There were 213 schools joining the Secondary One Program of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in the second year of the Full Implementation Phase in 2007/08 school year. The mean number of students per school was 171.05 (ranged from 16 to 267 students), with an average of 4.69 classes per school (ranged from 1 to 8 classes). Amongst them, 105 schools adopted the full program (i.e., 20-hour program involving 40 units) while 108 schools adopted the core program (i.e., 10-hour program involving 20 units). The mean number of sessions used to implement the program was 23.61 (ranged from 5 to 60 sessions). While 116 (54.50%) schools incorporated the program into the formal curriculum (e.g., Liberal Studies, Life Education), 97 schools (45.50%) used other modes (e.g., using form teacher's periods and other combinations) to implement the program. A total of 1,630 implementers carried out the program in the schools. The mean numbers of social workers and teachers implementing the program per school were 2.00 (ranged from 0 to 8) and 5.63 (ranged from 0 to 28), respectively.

After the Tier 1 Program was completed, the implementers were invited to respond to a subjective outcome evaluation questionnaire. A total of 1,324 implementers responded to the Subjective Outcome Evaluation Form for instructors (Form B) developed by the Research Team. The data collection was normally carried out after the completion of the program. To facilitate the program evaluation, the Research Team developed an evaluation manual with standardized instructions for collecting the subjective outcome evaluation data (4). In addition, adequate training was provided to the implementers during the 20-hour training workshops on how to collect and analyze the data collected by the questionnaire.

### **Instruments**

The Subjective Outcome Evaluation Form for instructors comprising 39 items on a Likert scale was used in the present study to measure implementers' perception towards (a) the program; (b) their own performance as program implementers; (c) the effectiveness of the program on students; (d) the extent to which they would recommend the program to other students with similar needs; (e) the extent to which they would teach similar programs in future; and (f) the extent to which the program implementation has helped the implementers' professional growth (4).

## **RESULTS**

Results showed that the questionnaire was internally consistent. The Cronbach's alpha for the whole Form B was .98, with mean inter-item correlation =.51. The findings is also consistent with the previous study (alpha = 0.97, mean interitem correlation = 0.47).

The quantitative findings based on the closed-ended questions are presented in this paper. There are several observations that can be highlighted from the findings. First, the respondents generally had positive perceptions of the program (Table 1), including clear objectives of the teaching units (94.63%), well-planned teaching activities (89.54%), and high peer interaction in the program (88.09%).

Table 1. Summary of the views of the implementers towards the program

	1		2		3		4		5		6		Participants with positive responses (options 4-6)	
	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Slightly Disagree		Slightly Agree		Agree		Strongly Agree			
	Disagree		Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Agree		Agree			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. The objectives of the curriculum are very clear. (N=1321)	1	0.08	14	1.06	56	4.24	295	22.33	853	64.57	102	7.72	1250	94.63
2. The design of the curriculum is very good. (N=1322)	10	0.76	44	3.33	148	11.20	523	39.56	548	41.45	49	3.71	1120	84.72
3. The activities were carefully planned. (N=1319)	4	0.30	31	2.35	103	7.81	460	34.87	650	49.28	71	5.38	1181	89.54
4. The classroom atmosphere was very pleasant. (N=1318)	4	0.30	27	2.05	138	10.47	438	33.23	606	45.98	105	7.97	1149	87.18
5. There was much peer interaction amongst the students. (N=1318)	2	0.15	29	2.20	126	9.56	487	36.95	588	44.61	86	6.53	1161	88.09
6. Students participated actively during lessons (including discussions, sharing, games, etc.). (N=1307)	5	0.38	41	3.14	140	10.71	461	35.27	567	43.38	93	7.12	1121	85.77
7. The program has a strong and sound theoretical support. (N=1303)	7	0.54	35	2.69	141	10.82	515	39.52	516	39.60	89	6.83	1120	85.96
8. The teaching experience I encountered enhanced my interest in the course. (N=1302)	22	1.69	61	4.69	179	13.75	504	38.71	476	36.56	60	4.61	1040	79.88
9. Overall speaking, I have very positive evaluation of the program. (N=1310)	15	1.15	73	5.57	181	13.82	516	39.39	483	36.87	42	3.21	1041	79.47
10. On the whole, students like this curriculum very much. (N=1307)	13	0.99	58	4.44	197	15.07	530	40.55	470	35.96	39	2.98	1039	79.50

Second, a high proportion of the respondents had positive evaluation of their performance (Table 2). For example, 99% of the respondents felt ready to offer help to their students; 98.62% of the respondents expressed that they were concerned about the students; 96.53% believed that they had very good professional attitudes.

Table 2. Summary of the views of the implementers about themselves

	1		2		3		4		5		6		Participants with positive responses (options 4-6)	
	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Slightly Disagree		Slightly Agree		Agree		Strongly Agree			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. I have a good mastery of the curriculum. (N=1313)	4	0.30	22	1.68	148	11.27	514	39.15	573	43.64	52	3.96	1139	86.75
2. I prepared well for the lessons. (N=1311)	1	0.08	15	1.14	114	8.70	488	37.22	608	46.38	85	6.48	1181	90.08
3. My teaching skills were good. (N=1298)	2	0.15	19	1.46	111	8.55	531	40.91	571	43.99	64	4.93	1166	89.83
4. I have good professional attitudes. (N=1298)	1	0.08	6	0.46	38	2.93	358	27.58	791	60.94	104	8.01	1253	96.53
5. I was very involved. (N=1297)	1	0.08	8	0.62	70	5.40	340	26.21	754	58.13	124	9.56	1218	93.91
6. I gained a lot during the course of instruction. (N=1299)	3	0.23	35	2.69	151	11.62	518	39.88	522	40.18	70	5.39	1110	85.45
7. I cared for the students. (N=1300)	0	0.00	4	0.31	14	1.08	243	18.69	831	63.92	208	16.00	1282	98.62
8. I was ready to offer help to students when needed. (N=1299)	0	0.00	3	0.23	10	0.77	163	12.55	849	65.36	274	21.09	1286	99.00
9. I had much interaction with the students. (N=1300)	0	0.00	11	0.85	70	5.38	445	34.23	651	50.08	123	9.46	1219	93.77
10. Overall speaking, I have very positive evaluation of myself as an instructor. (N=1303)	0	0.00	8	0.61	44	3.38	366	28.09	796	61.09	89	6.83	1251	96.01

Third, as shown in Table 3, many respondents perceived that the program promoted the development of students, including bonding (89.58%), social competence (92.80%), emotional competence (89.13%), moral competence (90.59%), self-understanding (92.47%), and overall development (93.53%).

Table 3. Perceived effectiveness of the program by the implementers

The extent to which the Tier 1 Program (i.e., the program in which all students have joined ) has helped your students:	1		2		3		4		5		Participants with positive responses (options 3-5)		Participants with positive responses (options 4-5)	
	Unhelpful		Not Very Helpful		Slightly Helpful		Helpful		Very Helpful					
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. It has strengthened students’ bonding with teachers, classmates and their families. (N=1305)	5	0.38	131	10.04	646	49.50	473	36.25	50	3.83	1169	89.58	523	40.08
2. It has strengthened students’ resilience in adverse conditions. (N=1304)	5	0.38	185	14.19	651	49.92	423	32.44	40	3.07	1114	85.43	463	35.51
3. It has enhanced students’ social competence. (N=1305)	4	0.31	90	6.90	529	40.54	600	45.98	82	6.28	1211	92.80	682	52.26
4. It has improved students’ ability in handling and expressing emotions. (N=1306)	4	0.31	138	10.57	566	43.34	535	40.96	63	4.82	1164	89.13	598	45.79
5. It has enhanced students’ cognitive competence. (N=1302)	6	0.46	178	13.67	607	46.62	450	34.56	61	4.69	1118	85.87	511	39.25
6. Students’ ability to resist harmful influences has been improved. (N=1304)	8	0.61	203	15.57	613	47.01	432	33.13	48	3.68	1093	83.82	480	36.81
7. It has strengthened students’ ability to distinguish between the good and the bad. (N=1318)	4	0.30	120	9.10	567	43.02	558	42.34	69	5.24	1194	90.59	627	47.57
8. It has increased students’ competence in making sensible and wise choices. (N=1316)	4	0.30	166	12.61	607	46.12	489	37.16	50	3.80	1146	87.08	539	40.96
9. It has helped students to have life reflections. (N=1305)	9	0.69	217	16.63	541	41.46	472	36.17	66	5.06	1079	82.68	538	41.23
10. It has reinforced students’ self-confidence. (N=1305)	11	0.84	234	17.93	592	45.36	412	31.57	56	4.29	1060	81.23	468	35.86
11. It has increased students’ self-awareness. (N=1315)	4	0.30	95	7.22	529	40.23	605	46.01	82	6.24	1216	92.47	687	52.24
12. It has helped students to face the future with a positive attitude. (N=1316)	16	1.22	202	15.35	600	45.59	457	34.73	41	3.12	1098	83.43	498	37.84
13. It has helped students to cultivate compassion and care about others. (N=1305)	7	0.54	191	14.64	562	43.07	500	38.31	45	3.45	1107	84.83	545	41.76
14. It has encouraged students to care about the community. (N=1305)	16	1.23	265	20.31	605	46.36	383	29.35	36	2.76	1024	78.47	419	32.11
15. It has promoted students’ sense of responsibility in serving the society. (N=1303)	14	1.07	257	19.72	611	46.89	382	29.32	39	2.99	1032	79.20	421	32.31
16. It has enriched the overall development of the students. (N=1314)	5	0.38	80	6.09	588	44.75	572	43.53	69	5.25	1229	93.53	641	48.78



When focusing on respondents' rating on which the program is 'helpful' and 'very helpful', at least one-third to half of the respondents perceived the program promoting students' development, including social competence (52.26%), self-awareness (52.24%), self-determination (40.96%), cognitive competence (39.25%), self-confidence (35.86%), and overall development (48.78%). Independent sample t-test was administered to compare the rating of the respondents in the first year of implementation with that of the second year of implementation. The findings indicate an increase in the perceived helpfulness in all items. Amongst them, the increase in seven items was statistically significant (Table 4).

Table 4. Significant increase in positive responses in Year2007-08

		(Year2006-07)		(Year2007-08)		Sig.(2-tailed)
Item		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p≤0.05
5.	It has enhanced students' cognitive competence	0.359	0.265	0.414	0.266	0.035
6.	Students' ability to resist harmful influences has been improved	0.317	0.260	0.383	0.255	0.008
7.	It has strengthened students' ability to distinguish between the good and the bad	0.429	0.278	0.490	0.258	0.02
12.	It has helped students to face the future with positive attitude	0.348	0.263	0.402	0.258	0.035
13.	It has helped students to cultivate compassion and care about others	0.349	0.271	0.428	0.252	0.002
14.	It has encouraged students to care about the community	0.256	0.236	0.332	0.246	0.001
15.	It has promoted students' sense of responsibility in serving the society	0.259	0.241	0.339	0.260	0.001

Fourth, 90.22% of the respondents would recommend the program to students with similar needs. Fifth, 81.92% of the respondents expressed that they would teach similar courses again in future. Finally, 82.45% of the respondents indicated that the program had helped their professional development (Table 5).

Table 5. Other aspects of subjective outcome evaluation based on the views of the respondents

Recommend the P.A.T.H.S. program to others students with similar needs and condition. (N = 1299)

1		2		3		4		Participants with positive responses (options 3-4)	
Definitely Will Not Suggest		Will Not Suggest		Will Suggest		Definitely Will Suggest			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
12	0.92	115	8.85	1043	80.29	129	9.93	1172	90.22

Willingness to teach similar programs again in the future. (N = 1289)

1		2		3		4		Participants with positive responses (options 3-4)	
Definitely Will Not Teach		Will Not Teach		Will Teach		Definitely Will Teach			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
20	1.55	213	16.52	931	72.23	125	9.70	1056	81.92

Helpfulness of the program in facilitating professional growth. (N = 1299)

1		2		3		4		5		Participants with positive responses (options 3-5)	
Unhelpful		Not Very Helpful		Slightly Helpful		Helpful		Very Helpful			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
23	1.77	205	15.78	583	44.88	430	33.10	58	4.46	1071	82.45

## **DISCUSSION**

In the current study, the subjective outcome evaluation findings based on program implementers' perspective showed that a high proportion of the respondents had positive perceptions towards the program and themselves; roughly four-fifths of the implementers regarded the program as helpful to the program participants. The present findings were consistent with the evaluation study in the first year of the Full Implementation Phase (1), and also the subjective outcome evaluation findings based on program participants in the first year and the second year of the Full Implementation Phase (5, 6). In short, the previously reported findings were replicated in the present study.

Furthermore, the findings were also in line with the evaluation findings based on objective outcome evaluation, process evaluation, interim evaluation and case study on the Full Implementation Phase (7, 8, 9, 10). In general, the overall picture based on the subjective outcome evaluation findings obtained from different sources was positive. The present findings further demonstrate the respondents' positive evaluation on the implementation of the Tier 1 Program of the P.A.T.H.S. Project.

In the second year of implementation, there was an increase in the perceived helpfulness of the program covering all items, and nearly half of them were statistically significant. The increase may have been due to the accumulation of experience from the first year of implementation, which is likely to contribute to a smoother implementation in the second year. There are several possible factors that lead to the observed findings. First, the implementers had better mastery of the program rationale and content. Second, the implementers got familiarized with the student-centred approach, group facilitation skills and more experiential approach which involved students' active participation. Their classroom-experience consolidated what they had learnt during the implementers' training provided by the program, and led to a better facilitation. Third, the implementers had deeper understanding in their students' interests and needs. Fourth, teachers and social workers could better communicate, collaborate, and give mutual support, which in turn shared the workload and alleviated their pressure. Fifth, the schools were more experienced in offering administrative support to the program and the implementers. Finally, the high proportion of positive feedback got in the first year encouraged the schools and the implementers to invest more resources, time and effort in launching the program, which resulted in a greater and more positive impact on students, and the perceived effectiveness on the program.

In line with the findings of Hui's study (2), the present study highlighted the importance of implementers' role and schools' support to the program implementation and result. These findings have practical implications. Continuity in the program is important. This is not the schools simply continue launching the implementation. In order to fully utilize the human resources, experiences and resources, schools may need

to consider the forming of an on-going team, specializing in carrying out the program in their own schools. The group of teachers and social workers takes charge of the whole program. The accumulation of experience and mutual support within the team would maximize the impact of the program on students and the efficiency and effectiveness in preparing and carrying out the program. This observation is also in line with the findings of several case studies that people (program implementers in particular) is a very important factor influencing the quality of program implementation (11).

Aside from the school system, as aforementioned, based on the perspective the ecological model, the participation of parents, the community and society are also essential to teenagers' positive development (12). It is pertinent to include some supplementary activities or projects in the program encouraging parental involvement. The school can encourage parents to involve in these activities, and strengthen home-school partnership in cultivating the students' positive development. The future implementation of P.A.T.H.S. may involve media through disseminating more positive values and promoting positive youth development, culture and atmosphere. Further collaboration with government agencies with similar vision and mission is also pertinent.

Another point to be addressed is that, when comparing the first and the second year data of the implementers' ratings on which the program was 'helpful' and 'very helpful' to participants, the ranking was similar, with enhancing students' social competence, increasing students' self-awareness and enriching the overall development of the students always in the top three. Enhancing students' social competence has the highest rating in both years. A possible contributing factor is that, apart from having the lessons on "Social Competence", students were exposed to the training in this aspect in most of the lessons of the program. Many activities (e.g. group discussion, group activities, role play, etc.) required students to cooperate and collaborate with their classmates that eventually improved their interpersonal skills and relationship with others. The case of promoting students' self-awareness is similar. Students' "self-awareness" can be enhanced through not only the designated lessons but also the encouragement on, and opportunities for, self-reflection in the program. The findings revealed that this kind of program design is effective, in the sense that the constructs are inter-related, offering opportunities for students to consolidate and practice what they had learnt in one lesson during another lesson. The more the students are exposed to the environment that enables them to consolidate and practise what they have learnt, the greater improvement the students would achieve.

However, it was also found that encouraging students' care about the community and promoting students' sense of responsibility in serving the society earned the lowest ranking in both years. Such finding is an expected direction side. Prosocial aspects and social responsibility of students are generally weaker in Hong Kong students, as there is

a trend that teenagers tend to amplify their rights and undermine their social responsibilities. Nevertheless, there was significant increase in responses on “helpful” and “very helpful” in the second year. These findings also revealed the increase emphasis on service learning in schools and the society. The secondary schools see the importance and benefits of participating in volunteering service. Some schools require their students to complete a certain amount of “social service hours” in an academic year as accomplishment and learning experience. The “Prosocial Norms” and “Prosocial Involvement” advocate in the Program also bring awareness to the schools to promote students’ prosocial attitude and behavior, as well as social responsibility.

At the same time, the government has been injecting resources in promoting civic education. For example, the Commission on Youth is responsible for enhancing the civic awareness of young people and their participation in community affairs (13). The theme of the Youth Summit in 2004 was “The voice and power of the new generation” which advocated a balanced attention to both rights and responsibilities (14). Other examples are the Volunteer Movement launched by the Social Welfare Department of HKSAR, with an objective to build a caring community, promoting the positive values of self-fulfillment, maximizing community resources and enhancing the sense of social belongings (15); as well as the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS) which plays a proactive and pivotal role in the promotion and development of volunteerism, and to develop partnership with all sectors of the community to provide value added and quality volunteer service (16).

There are several strengths in the current study. First, the subjective outcome evaluation findings were based on a large sample size ( $N=1,324$ ). The big sample size enhanced the generalizability of the research findings to other student population in Hong Kong. Second, the psychometric properties of the measurement were strong. The analysis showed that rating items of the questionnaire were interrelated and reliable, with reference to the sections and the whole scale. Third, different aspects of subjective outcome, including views of the program, program implementers, perceived effectiveness and overall satisfaction were covered.

Although the results are promising, it is noteworthy that there are several limitations of the study. This is a self-report study. The respondents may tend to, consciously or unconsciously, respond in a nice manner for the sake of social desirability. However, since the reports were submitted by the participating school anonymously, the possibility that the implementers reported in an over-cooperative manner was not high. Besides, negative ratings were recorded. Hence, the impact of the limitation of self-report study in the current evaluation may still exist, though should not be great. On the other hand, the program has only launched for two years. More years of implementation and longitudinal studies have to be carried out in order to investigate the long-term positive impact of the program. Despite these limitations, the

present findings suggested that the Tier 1 Program and its implementation were perceived in a positive manner by the program implementers and the implementers perceived the program beneficial to the development of the students and themselves.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The preparation for this paper and the Project P.A.T.H.S. were financially supported by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.

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